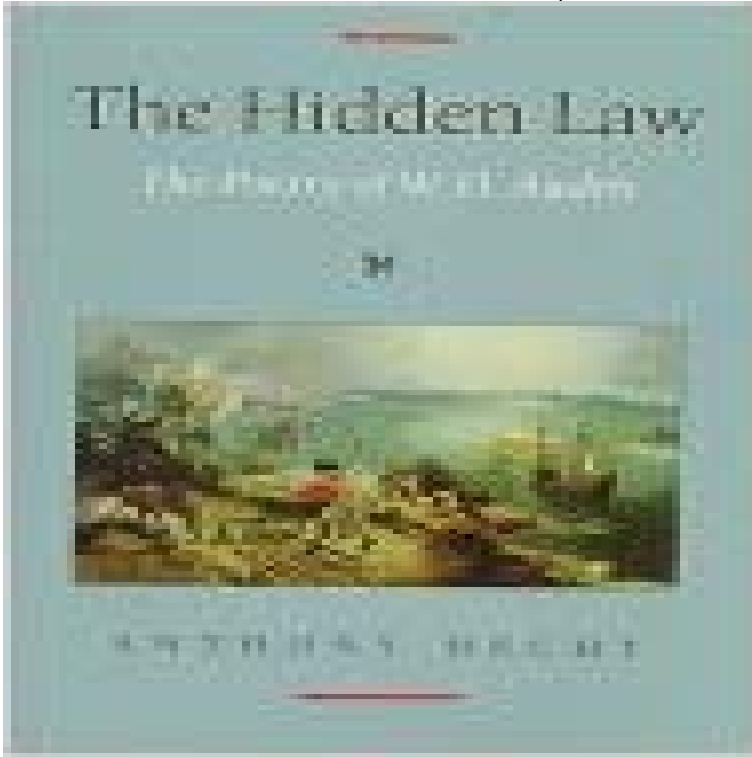


The Hidden Law: The Poetry of W. H. Auden



In this study - the fruit of a lifelong critical and imaginative engagement with W.H. Auden's works - Anthony Hecht identifies and traces consistent habits of thought and belief within the poet's extensive and varied writings and through his celebrated conversions and repudiations, literary and otherwise. Hecht acknowledges that Auden's poems both invite the intrusive scrutiny of the cryptographer and deny him access. Yet the readings he offers of poems from every phase of Auden's career, along with dramatic works and critical essays, manage to explicate and illuminate Auden's rich (and often cryptic) allusiveness without murdering to dissect. Among the themes that connect Auden's works are his deep interest in the workings of language; his notion of the ultimate frivolity of art; his interest in the nature of heroism; his understanding of the relation of public to private life; the development of his religious thought; and what Auden called the hidden law that governs human existence - a strict and retaliatory force, something like poetic justice, that gives form to our best literature and shapes our personal fates. Hecht identifies these preoccupations in Auden's works - and shows how they cut across the many genres in which he wrote - without losing sight of each poem's individual history and context. As one of Auden's poetic heirs, Anthony Hecht is well qualified to illuminate both the reading and the writing of these significant works of 20th century literature.

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